

-----Original Message-----

From: Valentine Lynch [mailto:vallynch@me.com]

Sent: Sunday, March 11, 2012 10:22 PM

To: SFAC

Subject: Free Fishing Areas

Fellow Commissioners and DNR Staff,

The Informational Memorandum prepared by Marty Gary and circulated last week is a concise summary of the background, issues, current status and department recommendations regarding Free Fishing Areas in Maryland.

I believe each Commissioner recognizes the benefits that Free Fishing Areas bring to the sport and the state of Maryland, and will join me in support of the purpose for FFAs, namely, "To provide opportunities for families to fish together, fostering the mentorship role of new and existing adult anglers and to maintain existing subsistence FFA opportunities for adult anglers in economically disadvantaged areas."

Permit me to address the three FFAs submitted for consideration by Worcester County and the Town of Ocean City: Northside Park Pier at 125th Street, the pier behind Convention Hall at 41st Street and the Chicago Avenue bulkhead from 2nd to 4th Street in the three block City Park area.

The department recommends both Northside Park and the Convention Hall sites as Free fishing Areas and I agree with the recommendation. Both sites are easily accessible, have ample parking and are considered safe. The low water depth and lack of bottom structure offer more opportunities for fishing than catching but these are excellent sites for families to gather and allow young children to learn basic angling skills.

The department does not recommend the Chicago area site and it is here that I respectfully take exception to the department's position and offer my support for this site as a Free Fishing Area.

Unlike the other two sites, Chicago Avenue offers a high quality fishing, and catching, experience. The Town of Ocean City has made a significant capital investment here by building a substantial boardwalk platform and artificial reef. The tidal flow, quite close to the inlet, brings a variety of species past the bulkhead on both tides and most any day or evening in season there's a good chance to land a keeper, and ample opportunity to practice the art of hook and release. It is sites like Chicago Avenue that kids, and adults, get hooked on fishing.

The department asserts that parking is very limited here but yesterday, Sue Foster advised: "I took a ride and counted the parking places this morning. 24 meter parking directly in front of the boardwalk. 2nd Street- free parking on both sides of the street, approx- 12. 3rd- approx-16. 4th Street- approx 17. On St. Louis Ave, for a 4 block radius, well over 40. Of course, they are shared with Ball Park and apartments, but not

bad parking for downtown OC. (Over 100 potential parking places.) Average stay per family (2 hours) according to Oceanic Pier when I asked them last year what the turnover was."

The department acknowledged that safety is not an issue during the day but opined that it might be after sundown. I spoke with local residents and determined that lighting in the area is good and disturbances are few since the site is a distance from the popular nighttime haunts of downtown Ocean City.

The department reports that interviews indicated subsistence fishing takes place at the site and my inquiries confirmed that. The memo states this is not a family oriented location but my personal experience, admittedly limited, and the comments of others who live in the area indicate that families do use the park and fish the bulkhead. It seems reasonable that more families would use the site if the adults could fish alongside their children for free.

Maryland DNR NRP has expressed concerns of overcrowding, not enforcement. There appears to be no evidence of overcrowding but that could certainly be addressed in the future, were it to become a problem. The department expressed concern about poachers. I'm not prepared to address that other than to say that poachers exist everywhere and if enforcement is not perceived to be a problem for Chicago Avenue then poaching should not be any more of a problem than if the site were not a Free Fishing Area.

Although the original 22 site allocated in 1985 were intended to afford each county equal treatment many had no sites or a single site while Worcester County had four. I believe the allocation should be equitable, not equal, and seven sites for Worcester County, considering the vast area of coastal fishing venues, merits these three additional sites. If the department would like to review the appropriateness of the four sites designated in 1985, that would certainly be reasonable.

It's important to remember that prior to 2011 ALL of coastal Ocean City was a free fishing area! I believe the town, so rich in fishing opportunities, merits these three FFAs.

Worcester County supports the the FFAs, as indicated by the following email I received last Thursday:

I would have to agree with all of Val's comments and hope the SFAC will take his points into consideration.

Lisa Challenger
Director
Worcester County Tourism

Tradespeople in Ocean City support the thee FFAs, as evidenced by the following comments from Sue Foster, Oyster Bay Tackle:

Even though children under 16 can fish free, I am seeing parents not taking their children to fish because *they* have to pay. Free fishing areas in Ocean City will give families a place to go so parents can teach their young children to fish without the fear of getting a ticket. (Many parents, especially the ones with small children are on tight budgets even while on vacation.)

Many families come to Ocean City to vacation, and fishing is a passing *thought* along with crabbing, boardwalk rides, renting a bike, or other activities, especially on a cloudy day. For many, it becomes their first fishing experience. We have been in business for 31 years and I have seen that once a child fishes once, he will want to go again. He or she may grow up into an angler and teach their children to fish. Future anglers are our focus.

And this from Captain Monty Hawkins:

I think the coast has transitioned to fee-structured fishing well. Here there is opportunity to account the most casual users of our aquatic resources in a free registry -- I'd like to see all three areas open to free fishing. The northern areas create no burden on our fisheries - very little is caught. The bulkhead at 3 & 4th streets is more productive, but not the fish-factory MuRFSS would have you believe.

The very fact that it is a public boardwalk--well light with parking; That we have built artificial reef there too, is indicative of Ocean City's desire to have guests enjoy fishing.

I trust I've made a fair and reasonable case for all three proposed Free Fishing Areas in Ocean City and I ask that you join me in supporting this recommendation to the department.

My best... Val Lynch